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ABSTRACT

An optional summer explorientation program for new students at York College, Pennsylvania, is described, and a literature review and York College survey results are presented. The program is designed to orient students to campus life and provide exposure to campus facilities, faculty, administration, and other students. The literature suggests that orientation programs can facilitate student adjustment and may use the following successful techniques: information sessions, open houses, developmental courses, entertainment programming, social activities, slide and videotape presentations, and small-group experiences. A 1982 survey of 588 incoming freshmen following the orientation program revealed the following major concerns: getting involved in campus life, developing effective study and test-taking techniques, and writing effective term papers. York College faculty, administrators, and student leaders participated in program planning, formal course presentations, and social events. An additional evaluation revealed that new students valued the developmental seminars, social activities, campus service presentations, and meeting students and staff. An orientation program schedule and data on attrition among program participants are included. (SW)

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A MODEL SUMMER FRESHMEN EXPLORIENTATION PROGRAM

FRANK MUSSANO

INTRODUCTION

An optional Summer Explorientation Program for new students was established at York College of Pennsylvania, a liberal arts institution with a full-time enrollment of 2200. The purpose of the project was to expand upon the role of the spring orientation programs which focus primarily upon scheduling, academic advising, and student services. Students were provided an opportunity to "explore" the campus facilities, faculty, administration, and other students while participating in sessions designed to "orient" them to the varied aspects of campus life. To facilitate planning, a review of the literature was undertaken. Since a concise formula for this type of program does not seem to be available in the professional journals, this article is intended to provide specific information for those involved in similar undertakings.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Successful Orientation Approaches

Various orientation approaches have been successfully employed to assist new students in meeting the intellectual, cultural, social, and emotional challenges of a college environment. Harris (1980) proposes that useful program components include information sessions, small group experiences, activities fairs, open houses, and entertainment activities. Sagaria (1979) identified three approaches for orientation courses: 1) interdisciplinary courses which emphasize the whole student in an intellectual environment, 2) developmental programs which focus upon the individual student as a person, and 3) utilitarian

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courses which emphasize mastery of a knowledge base. She concluded that all of these approaches represent valid ways to facilitate adjustment to a college environment, and to increase the rate of retention. At the University of Illinois, Howe and Perry (1978) surveyed 205 students who participated in a general orientation meeting. Results indicated that the slide and tape presentation and the following discussion period were quite helpful. An overwhelming majority of the respondents preferred group meetings of fourteen to forty-nine students.

Parental Involvement

Harris (1980) suggests that orientation programs should include a summer workshop for the parents of new students. Other studies support this notion. Forrer (1974) examined 1000 randomly selected sets of freshmen parents and concluded that an on-campus orientation program tends to create a greater awareness and more favorable perception of the college environment. Conrad (1976) studied a random sample of 842 parents who attended a three day freshmen-parent orientation session. He found that significant attitude changes occurred in the direction of a more liberal outlook toward student self-responsibility.

Faculty and Student Leader Involvement

Ross (1975) developed an effective orientation program in which faculty and student volunteers played an integral role in various mini-classes, social activities, and communication workshops. Shoulders (1975) found that in many successful orientation programs, a major ingredient consists of faculty members working closely with student leaders. Coles (1975) surveyed 2127 students who attended a summer orientation program for freshmen at SUNY, Buffalo. The respondents recommended the formation of small discussion groups, and increased interaction with faculty members.

Needs Assessment

Although Student Affairs professionals agree on the need for an orientation program, there are differing opinions about program content. Higginson, Moore,

and White (1981) report that Student Affairs programmers have been inaccurate in identifying the needs of freshmen. They suggest that much of the inaccuracy results from indirect methods of needs assessment, since upperclassmen and Student Affairs personnel rather than the freshmen themselves are typically involved in planning sessions. Jones (1978) also emphasizes the crucial importance of assessing specific student needs before developing program strategies.

Summary of the Literature

The professional literature suggests the following:

Orientation programs can facilitate the adjustment of new students to campus life.

Successfully utilized orientation techniques include information sessions, open houses, developmental courses, entertainment programming, social activities, slide and videotape presentations, mini-classes, and small group experiences.

Parents of new students can benefit from an orientation workshop experience.

Faculty and upperclass student leaders should play an integral role in the orientation process.

A needs assessment of the new students should be undertaken to establish a more effective program.

NEEDS SURVEY

In the summer of 1980, a small pilot Freshmen Explorientation project was developed in which seventeen women and sixteen men participated. The program agenda was initially based on the input from upperclass students, professional literature, and Student Affairs professionals. In 1981 and 1982, the program was opened to all interested new students. To assist in refining the agenda, and to better meet the expressed needs of the student body, all 588 incoming freshmen were surveyed immediately following the spring orientation programs in

early May, 1982. They were asked to rate thirty-nine college related concerns compiled from the professional literature, according to a five-point Likert-type scale. (A score of five receives the highest priority.) Basic results of the inventory completed by 255 students are included in the table below.

Rating Results of Thirty-Nine Freshmen Concerns Within Four Categories

Rank	Mean Rating	Concern
		Personal/Social
1	4.52	Getting involved in campus life
2	3.62	Ice breaking exercises (structured exercises designed to have you get to know other freshmen participating in the workshop)
3	3.57	Time management
4	3.55	Money management (checking account, developing a budget, etc.)
5	3.35	Establishing independence
6	3.27	How to make friends
7	3.10	Peer pressure--what to expect
8	3.05	Resolving roommate conflicts
		Academic
1	4.34	Developing effective study techniques
2	4.24	Techniques for passing exams
3	4.22	Writing effective term papers
4	3.98	Career planning
5	3.96	Course schedule planning (required courses, course load, use of the college catalogue, etc.)
6	3.58	Selecting a major
7	3.57	Effective use of the library
8	3.31	Role of the academic advisor
		Student Services
1	3.80	Financial Aid (loans, scholarships, grants)
2	3.72	Extracurricular activities
3	3.46	Part-time employment
4	3.44	Student clubs
5	3.37	Intramural sports
6	3.37	Residence hall living
7	3.35	Health care
8	3.35	Intercollegiate athletics
9	3.28	Personal counseling
10	3.11	Food services
11	3.00	Fraternities and sororities
12	3.00	Insurance
13	2.98	Cultural activities
14	2.78	Religious services

General Campus Information

1	4.00	Buying books and supplies
2	3.99	What to bring to campus this fall
3	3.73	Billing schedules and costs at York College
4	3.63	How to register for classes
5	3.43	Information on York County (shopping malls, restaurants, theaters, recreational facilities, points of interest, etc.)
6	3.12	Campus security
7	3.04	Campus media and information systems
8	2.96	Auto registration and policies
9	2.74	Tour of the campus

The four concerns receiving the highest overall ratings were, in hierarchical order: getting involved in campus life, developing effective study techniques, techniques for passing exams, and writing effective term papers. All of the issues with high ratings were emphasized in the 1982 Freshmen Explorientation Program. It is interesting to note that "getting involved in campus life" was the overwhelming top priority.

THE AGENDA

Based on the freshmen inventory results, various recommendations, and past experience, the planning committee established the following Explorientation schedule for August 8, 9, and 10, 1982. Actually, four separate schedules were developed to accommodate four groups of less than fifty students each. Faculty, administrators, and student leaders were extensively involved in all phases of the program including planning, formal course presentations, and participation in mealtimes and social events.

The one-and-one-half-hour parents/students seminar involved the presentation of five videotaped vignettes in which student actors portrayed examples of the following conflict areas: changing a major, peer pressure, roommate conflicts, drugs and alcohol, and dissatisfaction with college. Following the viewings, participants were divided into groups of fifteen-twenty individuals. A faculty or staff facilitator initiated discussions relative to each conflict area.

Typical Explorientation Schedule

Sunday, August 8

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Check-in (swimming pool, volleyball and tennis courts, gymnasium and game room remain open through the program)
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Parents/students seminar
3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Parents/students volleyball game
5:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.	Parents/students/faculty dinner (addressed by the College President)
7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Ice breaker exercises
8:15 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.	Ecumenical services
9:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	Break--coffee, soda, and snacks provided
9:30 p.m.	Student film
11:30 p.m.	Pizza party featuring live entertainment

Monday, August 9

8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Breakfast
9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Presentation of campus services and departments: Business Office--bill paying, deposits, check cashing; Records Office--transcripts, academic progress, change of address; Scheduling Office--academic advising, changing major, drop/add; Financial Aid Office--grants, loans, work-study programs; and the Bookstore--textbook purchasing, "campus commodities."
11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Seminar--Effective Use of the Library
12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Presentations by the Athletic Department, Student Activities Office, and Student Organizations leaders
2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.	Seminar--Writing Effective Term Papers
3:45 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Break--coffee, soda, and snacks provided
4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.	Presentations by the Publications Department, Residence Life Office, Food Services, and Campus Security
5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
6:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Free period
7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Student bingo featuring hundreds of dollars in prizes
9:00 p.m. - Midnight	Outdoor concert

Tuesday, August 10

8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Breakfast
9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Seminar--Effective Study and Exam-Taking Techniques
10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Seminar--Career Planning
Noon	Picnic lunch with faculty, staff, student organization leaders (family members welcome)
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Checkout

PROGRAM COSTS

The initial 1980 and 1981 pilot programs were subsidized through a Hoffmann-La Roche grant. During the summer of 1982, a $50 enrollment fee covered all basic expenses incurred for meals and supplies.

EVALUATION

Following the 1982 programs, separate formal questionnaires were distributed to parents and students. Over 96% of the 139 parents who responded perceived the seminar as being worthwhile. They believed the goals of the program were clear, meaningful, and accomplished in a positive manner. The small group discussions facilitated by representatives of the College were particularly well received. Some criticisms of the videotapes were expressed because no specific cookbook-type solutions were offered for the problems presented.

The student respondents unanimously felt that the experience was very positive and would help facilitate adjustment to college life. The four most rewarding aspects of the program were ranked in hierarchical order as follows: 1) developmental seminars, 2) social activities, 3) campus service presentations, and 4) meeting faculty, administrators, and new students. However, 10% of the respondents expressed a need for even greater faculty involvement.

EFFECT ON ATTRITION

Attrition Rate and Grade Point Average Following One Semester

	1980 Program Participants	1980 Entire Freshmen Class	1981 Program Participants	1981 Entire Freshmen Class
Total Number	35	657	187	723
Number Dropouts	1	76	12	69
Percentage Dropouts	2.8	11.57	6.40	9.54
Grade Point Average	2.33	2.39	2.30	2.41

Taken at face value, the above figures would seem to indicate that after one semester, Explorientation participants tend to achieve lower grades but are more persistent than other freshmen in their academic pursuits. However, non-directional t tests and chi square analysis indicated that no statistically significant differences existed between groups during either year relative to grade point averages and attrition rate . Because the dropout population is extremely small, relatively huge discrepencies must exist before significant differences can be empirically confirmed. It is apparent that more extensive attrition data must be collected before any real conclusions can be drawn. Thus, following the revised 1982 program agenda, a comprehensive longitudinal study will be undertaken.

CONCLUSION

A Freshmen Explorientation Program can serve as a useful device for enhancing the adjustment of new students into campus life. Both students and parents feel positive about the small group interactions with faculty, administration, and student leaders as well as their own peers. A variety of approaches can work successfully including information sessions, mini-classes, entertainment programs, developmental courses, videotape presentations, etc. Further research is necessary to determine whether such programming not only allows students to feel more comfortable, but also promotes a commitment to the institution and reduces attrition.

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